

The Hornets and the Bees

by Jean de La Fontaine

"The artist by his work is known."

A piece of honey-comb, one day,
Discover'd as a waif and stray,
The hornets treated as their own.
Their title did the bees dispute,
And brought before a wasp the suit.
The judge was puzzled to decide,
For nothing could be testified
Save that around this honey-comb
There had been seen, as if at home,
Some longish, brownish, buzzing creatures,
Much like the bees in wings and features.
But what of that? for marks the same,
The hornets, too, could truly claim.
Between assertion, and denial,
The wasp, in doubt, proclaim'd new trial;
And, hearing what an ant-hill swore,
Could see no clearer than before.

"What use, I pray, of this expense?"
At last exclaim'd a bee of sense.

"We've labour'd months in this affair,
And now are only where we were.

Meanwhile the honey runs to waste:
'Tis time the judge should show some haste.
The parties, sure, have had sufficient bleeding,
Without more fuss of scrawls and pleading.
Let's set ourselves at work, these drones and we
And then all eyes the truth may plainly see,
Whose art it is that can produce
The magic cells, the nectar juice."
The hornets, flinching on their part,
Show that the work transcends their art.
The wasp at length their title sees,
And gives the honey to the bees.

Would God that suits at law with us

Might all be managed thus!